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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002077

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#) [SETTLEMENTS](#)

SUBJECT: MK TALKS OF EXPANDING HEBRON SETTLEMENTS

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

This is a joint Embassy Tel Aviv/Consulate General Jerusalem cable.

1. (C) Summary: Kadima MK Otniel Schneller said on May 26 that the GOI plans to expand settlements in Hebron and connect them to the Kiryat Arba settlement, all of which would subsequently be included in the GOI's "realignment" plan, according to press. Ministry of Defense officials denied that this report is true, and said that Schneller is "politicking" because he is "now an MK and he has to say something." Andrea Recchia of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) agreed that Schneller is "posturing." While plans for Hebron's settlements to grow may not exist, Kiryat Arba settlement itself appears to be growing. Emad Hamdan, Acting Director General of the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC), informed poloff and econoff last week that settlers there recently built a new fence beyond the location of the original fence bordering the settlement, and are effectively expanding the settlement and confiscating agricultural land belonging to Palestinians from Hebron. End note.

Plans to Expand Hebron-Area Settlements?

2. (U) Israeli media reported on May 26 that Kadima MK Otniel Schneller, who is a reported influential advisor on settlements and is also a settler, said that the GOI plans to enlarge settlements in Hebron and connect them to the Kiryat Arba settlement. He added that all of these settlements would be included in Israel under the GOI's "realignment" plan. While Schneller stressed that he was not speaking in an official capacity, an unnamed government source was quoted as saying that "Israel has always planned to retain the holy sites in Hebron." Noam Arnon, a spokesman for Hebron's settler community, also said in the article that former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon always insisted that Hebron's settler community would remain a part of Israel's final borders.

GOI Officials Deny Reports

3. (C) Brig. Gen. (ret.) Baruch Spiegel, advisor in the Ministry of Defense (MOD), told Embassy EconCouns on May 30 that he has not heard of any plans to expand settlements in Hebron. He mentioned that he would try to find out more information and follow up on May 31. Lt. Col. Oded Herman, also an advisor in the MOD, told econoff that Schneller is "politicking" because he is "now an MK and he has to say something." Herman said that he is not familiar with any plan to expand settlements in Hebron, and that Schneller is not speaking on behalf of the GOI. Herman brushed off Schneller's comments by remarking that "he can say whatever he wants."

"Schneller is Posturing"

4. (C) Andrea Recchia, Hebron field officer for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told ConGen poloff on May 30 that he has witnessed no activities on the ground around Kiryat Arba. He opined that Schneller's statements about settlement expansion in the Hebron area were just "political posturing." He added that settlers have long had the desire to connect Kiryat Arba with Givat Ha'avot 450 meters to the northwest, and that one of the outposts Defense Minister Amir Peretz has identified for evacuation, Havon David, is located in this area.

But Kiryat Arba May Grow

5. (C) Emad Hamdan, Acting Director General of the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC), however, told poloff and econoff on May 22 that Kiryat Arba recently built a new fence between 5 and 50 meters beyond the location of the original fence bordering the settlement, effectively expanding the settlement and confiscating agricultural land belonging to Palestinians from Hebron. (Note: Kiryat Arba borders the H2

area of Hebron to the east. End note.) He explained that HRC appealed to the Israeli High Court of Justice to have the new fence removed, and said that while the High Court has not reached a decision on this case, it has allowed Palestinians to access their lands between the two fences for now. In the meantime, the settlers have taken out the old fence and left the new fence in place, removing any barrier between the settlers and Palestinians farming their land, according to Hamdan. He also reported that he has spotted several caravans around the settlement.

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CRETZ